

ELK ARCHERY WORKING GROUP, DECEMBER 2011

INTRODUCTION

In February 2008, the FWP Commission adopted new elk archery permit regulations in seven hunting districts (HDs) in the Missouri River Breaks (HDs 410, 417, 620, 621, 622, 700 and 701) and 23 hunting districts outside the Breaks (HDs 401, 403, 411, 412, 420, 426, 441, 447, 450, 455, 500, 502, 510, 511, 520, 530, 570, 575, 580, 590, 702, 704 and 705). These 23 districts were identified for the presence of either sex rifle permits already in place. In the Breaks, the season structure went from unlimited either sex (bull) permits to limited permits. Outside the Breaks, the archery season structure went from general license to unlimited permits to limited permits for either sex (bull elk) across two hunting seasons (2008 and 2009). Antlerless harvest outside the Breaks remained available on general licenses during the archery season. All 30 HDs were grouped into 11 groups or “bundles” made up of one to five HDs (410/417, 620/621/622, 700/701, 401/403/441/450, 411/412/426/511/530, 420/447/455, 500/570, 502/510/520/575, 580, 590, 702/704/705). The volume of public input was large and divided.

During the 2010-2011 season setting process, this permit structure was maintained except in one hunting district outside the Breaks (HD 441) and with some adjustments to permits levels and/or the biennial permit ranges. While public comment remained divided, volume was considerably less than in 2008.

Reasons behind this series of adoptions include Consistency, Equity, Management Effectiveness and Hunt Quality (i.e., crowding, hunter shift potential). Expressed support for these adoptions has been primarily nested with resident hunters. Expressed opposition has a greater representation of landowners, outfitters and nonresident hunters. Support most typically is expressed as variations of the above justifications while opposition is often expressed as lost opportunity/flexibility for resident and nonresident hunters and lost dollars for landowners, outfitters and/or local economies.

Since the 2008 adoptions there have been efforts to defend, reverse, revisit or modify the adopted season structure. Recognizing the division of perspectives, the Commission framed a first working group that met thru the summer of 2008 with a charge and opportunity to explore options that continued to address the adoption’s justifications. Despite good and significant effort, that group did not reach consensus and the original adoptions were maintained. Later efforts to modify the season structure during the 2010 – 2011 season setting process resulted in the adoptions being maintained except in HD 441. Efforts to reverse or modify the season structure have appeared in both the 2009 and 2011 legislative sessions. Those efforts have been resisted by sporting interests resulting in the maintenance of the adopted season structure.

In specific response to the contentious debate on this topic in the 2011 legislative session, FWP framed a Commission work session that reviewed the history of the adoptions and offered opportunity for public comment. At that time, FWP staff also proposed a second facilitated working group. A call for nominations was made with ten private citizens of Montana ultimately sitting on the (second) “Elk Archery Working Group”.

These individuals represented a diversity of experience across Montana's geography and included landowners, public sporting interests and commercial/fee hunting perspectives. The working group members are Henry Bedford - Roundup, Jack Billingsley - Glasgow, Ed Bukoskey - Rosebud, Ray Gross - Dillon, Art Hayes - Birney, Bill McKinley - Conrad, Rick Miller - Colstrip, Terry Stiles - Malta, Jason Tounsley - Billings and Doug Krings - Lewistown. Dr. Mike Mitchell of the University of Montana Wildlife Co-op Unit was the facilitator. Several FWP staff members assisted with facilitation/logistics and technical inputs. Dr. Mitchell and FWP staff members were not part of the working group's consensus decisions. Staff members of the US Fish and Wildlife Service from the CMR Wildlife Refuge attended some meetings as did various members of the public.

Four working group meetings were initially identified from July to October with an eye to the biennial season setting Commission meeting in December (all four meetings ran for 1-1/2 days). In an effort to make the meetings more available for public observations, the meetings were held in Lewistown, Billings, Malta and Miles City. An additional one-day meeting was held on November 4 in Lewistown. Within the identified potential of this working group was the opportunity to develop recommended adjustments or alternatives to the current season structure that may be presented to the FWP Commission for consideration and possible adoption. The working group discussed and recognized they could only make recommendations and that any Commission adoption of a recommendation may not occur or may occur with adjustments.

The facilitated process applied Structured Decision Making to pursue full consensus on a written problem statement, fundamental objectives and recommendations. In the end, full consensus was not achieved.

STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING

Structured decision making (SDM) is formal application of common sense for situations too complex for the informal use of common sense, and is designed to improve the quality and efficacy of difficult decisions. SDM was first developed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service when they applied decision theory to season setting for mid-continental mallard ducks. Over years of setting mallard seasons, extensive public scrutiny and litigation created a strong demand for decision-making that was transparent, logical, repeatable, and therefore ultimately defensible. The SDM process was developed to meet these criteria through formalizing common sense.

SDM consists of 5 steps arranged in an iterative sequence: define the Problem, identify Objectives that would characterize successful resolution of the problem, develop management Alternatives to meeting those objectives, identify Consequences for each of the alternatives, and evaluate Trade-offs among the alternatives.

Each successive step builds on the last, though learning achieved throughout the SDM process often requires returning to an earlier step to refine and improve the decision-making process. SDM is designed to assist decision-makers in making the best decisions possible, given all factors contributing to the decision-making process (e.g., policy, law, best available science, etc.). It is not an analytical "black box" that will produce a single, optimum solution to a problem. Rather, it is designed to make explicit all factors contributing to a problem and through logical evaluation allow decision-makers to develop and weigh solutions and select the one they believe best meets their objectives. SDM also explicitly addresses uncertainty in the decision-making process; it makes the most of available knowledge, acknowledges the limits on predicting outcomes of decisions due to uncertainty, and provides a framework for reducing uncertainty in future decisions (i.e., Adaptive Management). The following sections briefly define each of the steps of SDM.

Problem

Accurately defining the problem creating the need for a decision is the critical first step in structured decision making, guiding process toward appropriate tools and information and determining appropriate levels of investment. Often, the problem is not obvious; understanding of the problem is improved by going through the SDM process, often requiring more than 1 iteration (especially in complicated public sector problems). When defining the problem, important considerations include:

- What action needs to be taken?
- What is the decision?
- Why does this decision matter?
- What are the legal constraints?
- Who will make (and take responsibility for) the decision?

Time spent defining the problem well is critical, all other steps in SDM depend on this one.

Objectives

Objectives define what the decision-makers really care about; i.e., what would constitute successful outcomes of a well-made decision? Defining objectives well is essential to creating management alternatives, comparing alternatives, choosing information needed for making the decision, and explain decisions to others. Within SDM, it is important to distinguish between fundamental and means objectives. A fundamental objective reflects the bottom line, or “where we want to go?”, whereas a means objective reflects "how do we get there?" Within SDM, decisions are based on the extent to which they address fundamental objectives, as much as possible.

Alternatives

Alternatives represent a variety of unique management approaches to meeting fundamental objectives. Good alternatives address the future, not the past, encompass a broad range of possible actions, are financially, legally, and politically reasonable, address all objectives, and can actually be implemented by the decision makers.

Consequences

Consequences predict the outcome for each objective under each alternative and allow assessment of relative contributions of actions to objectives. Analysis of consequences will:

- Improve transparency of judgments
- Recognize trade-offs and uncertainties
- Separate values from facts
- Provide framework for communication/discussion
- Provide insight but doesn't "make" the decision
- Identify uncertainty that needs to be addressed through research, monitoring

Trade-offs

This is the analysis of alternatives based on their relative consequences for fundamental objectives. This analysis can be anywhere from verbal to mathematical, depending on the complexity of the problem. In all cases, it is designed to inform the judgment of decision-makers based on all available information. To do this, the analysis should be transparent, comprehensive, explicit, make use of best available information, and address uncertainty directly.

APPLICATION OF SDM TO IDENTIFYING ELK ARCHERY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2012 AND 2013 HUNTING SEASONS

On July 25, 2011, ten Montana citizens with facilitation assistance from Dr. Mike Mitchell and FWP staff members met to begin deliberations on developing elk archery hunting season recommendations to the FWP Commission. Confirming the intent to assemble a diverse and representative working group, discussion clearly identified detailed experience with overt support for both the status quo and for change.

Problem Statement

After discussing SDM and methods for identifying a good problem statement at the first meeting in Lewistown, participants were divided into three break-out groups to brainstorm proposed problem statements. Ultimately, this overall effort would continue to alternate between break-out groups and full working group discussions. With a summarizing effort from staff between the first and second meetings and with references to the issues identified by the Commission at the season's adoption, the following problem statement was identified with consensus at the start of the second meeting in Billings (August 24 – 25).

The FWP Commission implemented limited-entry archery elk hunting regulations in the Missouri River Breaks and 22 other districts with limited-entry rifle elk hunting regulations beginning in 2008. The purpose of these regulations included equitable allocation of elk hunting opportunity among user groups, consistent application of regulations across districts, minimization of crowding, minimization of hunter displacement to other districts, and maximization of the ability to manage elk herds within specified objectives using antlerless elk harvest during the general season. The limited entry regulations have been very controversial since their implementation in 2008. The FWP Commission now needs to establish elk archery regulations for 2012/2013 and every 2 years thereafter due to the biennial season-setting timeline. This timeline affords them the opportunity to learn from the implementation of the 2008 season and every subsequent decision. Their decisions will affect the balance among bow and rifle hunter opportunities, hunter desires for freedom of opportunity and hunt quality, private landowner options for managing hunter access on their property, landowner and outfitter business models that have relied on predictable license allocations and exclusive access to elk, communities that have derived economic benefits from elk hunters, and consistency and understandability of regulations. In making the decisions, the FWP Commission will have to consider the ability to obtain sufficient, well-distributed cow elk harvest to meet laws requiring them to manage elk within objectives, resident and non-resident hunter numbers, and the variable nature of the hunting districts to which the regulations have been applied.

Objectives

After discussing methods for defining fundamental objectives based on a problem statement, participants again alternated between break-out groups and whole group discussions to develop fundamental objectives. Requiring considerable effort, the fundamental objectives below required most of the second meeting in Billings, spilled into the third meeting in Malta (September 19 – 20) and were revisited at the fourth meeting in Miles City (October 17 – 18). The sharpest debates occurred over the concepts of public opportunity/wildlife and exclusive access situations relative to commercial or fee hunting operations. Across the width of the discussion, various inputs ranged from clear efforts to find/define a

“balance” of interests to precluding one or another perspective. One fundamental input was the concept that elk present and available more on accessible public lands would fundamentally and positively address many concerns. Measurable attributes (listed below with fundamental objectives) were also identified.

Fundamental Objectives (measurable attributes and desired direction in parenthesis)

- *Maintain elk on public land proportional to available habitat (perception of proportional elk distribution, 0-100, 100=elk distribution perfectly proportional to available public land, maximize)*
- *Maximize satisfaction of user groups with season structure/regulations*
 - *resident rifle hunters (average resident drawing odds for rifle permits, 0-100, maximize)*
 - *resident bow hunters (average resident drawing odds for archery permits, 0-100, maximize)*
 - *non-resident hunters (average non-resident drawing odds for archery and rifle permits, 0-100, maximize)*
 - *landowners (average non-resident drawing odds for archery and rifle permits, 0-100, maximize)*
- *Minimize negative local economic impact*
 - *Businesses (total hunter days, 0-100, maximize)*
 - *outfitters (non-resident hunter days, 0-100, maximize)*
 - *landowners (total hunter days, 0-100, maximize)*
- *Meet population objectives (percentage of districts not over objective, 0-100, maximize)*
- *Manage wildlife as a public trust (perception of balance between private and public interests, 0-100, maximize)*
- *Maintain Montana balance between commercial/landowner and sportsman interests*
 - *Minimize exclusive access (i.e., fee hunting only) to public wildlife (perceived access for resident hunters, 0-100, 0=no access, maximize)*

- *Maintain opportunities for commercial benefit for landowners (number of non-resident hunter days, 0-100, maximize)*
- *Promote access to private and public lands (perceived access for resident hunters, 0-100, 0=no access)*
- *Keep regulations as simple as possible (0-100, 0=complex, 100=simple, maximize)*
- *Minimize regulation changes over time(0-100, 0=many changes, 100=no changes, maximize)*
- *Maintain consistency of regulations across permit areas (0-100, 0=many changes, 100=no changes, maximize)*

Alternatives

The working group's effort at the September meeting in Malta was largely directed to developing alternatives. Once again relying upon break-out groups, a list of alternative season types was brain-stormed. The break-out groups returned and presented their products to the larger group where clarification and further refinements were made. Given the many details that include drawing choices and statutory language, much of the Malta meeting was spent merely listing and describing the following alternatives and identifying them as being coarsely possible. In Malta there was no formal assessment of these alternatives' contributions to fundamental objectives (consequences and trade-offs). This same discussion also resulted in a "parking lot" for ideas or concepts that might be applied to some or all of the alternatives. To be clear, this list started and ended as a running list with no thorough exploration of consensus on every item. That said, the working group clearly wanted the parking lot to remain a visible product of their deliberations.

- **Status Quo:**
 - *outside the Breaks: bundled districts, limited entry rifle and archery, archery permits set at 90% 1st and 2nd choice, antlerless elk general license*
 - *inside Breaks: bundled districts, limited entry rifle and archery, archery permits set at approx. 75% of previous 3-yr average*
- **2007**
 - *outside Breaks: limited entry rifle hunting, general license archery hunting*
 - *inside Breaks: unlimited archery permit, 1st choice only in regions 4 & 6, 1st/2nd/3rd choice region 7*
- **Group Alternative #1**

- *In Breaks—limited permits; successful applicants can hunt a bull in no other place during the archery season; bundles may stay*
- *Outside Breaks—Determine season structure individually by HD or bundle*
- **Group Alternative #2**
 - *In Breaks—limited permits; successful applicants can hunt a bull in no other place during the archery and rifle seasons; bundles may stay*
 - *Outside Breaks--900 type limited elk permit for all 22 areas outside the Breaks; successful applicants can hunt a bull no other place than in districts where permit is valid during the archery season*
- **Group Alternative #3**
 - *In and Out of Breaks: on public/BMA land—status quo; other private lands—unlimited archery permits if elk population is within objective (reviewed every two years), antlerless only for rifle and archery if above objective*
- **Group Alternative #3 REFINED? (18 Oct 11)**
 - *In and Out of Breaks--limited permits status quo; private lands—add unlimited archery permits if elk population is within objective or if annual harvest prescription is met (reviewed every two years), antlerless only for rifle and archery on non-block management private land if above objective*
- **Group Alternative #4**
 - *In and out of Breaks same bundles at 80% of current permit totals; status quo permit type for these 80%*
 - *add 900 either sex archery permit valid inside and outside Breaks; successful applicants can hunt a bull in no other place or season; permit quota set at sum total of 20% of current individual permit totals*
 - *Percentage adjusted per interest/participation*
- **Group Alternative #5**
 - *Inside Breaks status quo*

- *Outside the Breaks same bundles at 80% of current permit totals*
- *add 900 either sex archery permit valid outside Breaks; successful applicants can hunt a bull in no other place or season; quota set at sum total of 20% of current individual permit totals*
- *Percentage adjusted per interest/participation*
- **Group Alternative #6**
 - *Inside Breaks status quo*
 - *Outside Breaks rebundle districts (for example, 702 separated from 704/705); new bundles with high public land and/or high available elk remain status quo; new bundles with low public land and/or low available elk unlimited first choice only, successful applicants can hunt a bull in no other place or season*
- **Group Alternative #7**
 - *45,000 elk archery permits valid anywhere in the state except for specific districts as per 2007 (HDs 380, 680, 630, etc.); annual permit number matched to resident interest*
- **Group Alternative #7A**
 - *elk archery permits valid anywhere in the state except for specific districts as per 2007 (HDs 380, 680, 630, etc.); annual permit number matched to resident interest; may hunt elk with rifle during general season on general license as per specific area regulations*
 - *Breaks—status quo*
- **Group Alternative #8**
 - *Inside Breaks status quo*
 - *Outside Breaks 2007 season structure (general licenses)*

Potentially common to some or all alternatives (parking lot)

- *Mandatory reporting*
- *Measure participation in commercial activity (hunt clubs, fee), opinions and perceptions*
- *Surveys (beyond aerial surveys, hunter surveys) for elk distribution during hunting season*
- *Increased and more open communication between landowners and biologists to discuss wildlife and habitat*
- *Guarantee 10% for nonresidents (in statute)*
- *New license preference system applied to permits for nonresidents; elk bonus points eliminated for nonresidents*
- *3-7 year waiting period for rifle permits; landowner preference property exempt*
- *New landowner sponsored permit/license tied to public access; not limited to current definition of designees (statute)*
- *Establish criteria for transition in/out of permits; local working groups (new or existing) used*
- *All areas--archery permit applications separate from rifle permit applications (statute)*
- *Filter for successful elk permit applicants before they draw a B license*
- *Unlimited permits in return for negotiated access to private land (HD 590 test area); other areas?*
- *Archery stamp is prerequisite for permit drawing*
- *Revisit elk mgmt. plan management objectives to include distribution objectives*
- *Provide more incentives to landowners for public access*
- *Unlimited permits in return for negotiated access to private land*
- *A 900 type license valid throughout areas*

Consequences and Trade-offs

At the final (scheduled) meeting in Miles City and after some review and refinement of alternatives and measurable metrics of fundamental objectives, the consequences of each season alternative were developed within the group. The working group members were asked to individually and explicitly predict how each alternative would perform relative to the fundamental objectives. For predicting the consequences of a given alternative for some objectives, for example minimizing negative economic impacts to outfitters, which we agreed to measure in terms of non-resident hunter days, FWP had data from before and during the implementation of the limited-entry elk archery regulations. FWP provided summaries of these data for the working group members to consider in making predictions about the impacts of the alternatives for these objectives. In the many cases where direct information on consequences was missing, individuals were instructed to base their prediction upon personal experiences and perspectives. Some attributes were assigned values relative to data from 2007 and/or the status quo season structure. The consequences for each alternative were included in a single consequence table to visually assist the presentation, understanding and comparison of the different alternatives' performance.

The consequences for each alternative were averaged across working group members, and then they were mathematically standardized so that they ranged from 0 (poor outcome) to 1 (ideal outcome). They were also weighted by the individual working group members as they each assessed relative values of the different fundamental objectives. The consequence values for each alternative were then summed across fundamental objectives; this sum represented the working group's combined assessment of which alternative was most likely to best address the full list of fundamental objectives. The alternative that best "performed" in this process was Alternative 3. This alternative is generally described by an additional set of either sex elk archery permits valid only on private land outside Block Management Areas (with other limitations). In an effort to describe and provide context for Alternative 3, the italicized section below has been included in this report. It represents an exchange among working group members as they reviewed the final recommendation.

Our department biologists are forced to do 90% of the management harvest on public lands where only 10% of the elk reside. Basically, we are shooting out the "good elk" (those that live on public land) year after year, which is resulting in very low public land populations. If this broken strategy continues, the public land elk opportunity will become a less and less desirable experience. As resident hunter focus turns away from elk-less public land to elk-rich private land opportunities, balance gets even further out of whack, with a strong push to the commercializing side and private herd management.

Alternative 3 attempts to focus on the following key elements:

#1) Provide a better means to manage elk where they need to be harvested. If we can somehow swap the current management strategy to harvesting 90% of the elk where 90% of them actually live (private lands), we can relieve some of the pressure and harvest imbalance. With any luck, that equalizing affect may actually help redistribute elk back to the public side of the fence, and it most certainly will help the "good elk" populations stabilize and expand.

#2) Provide additional resident elk harvest opportunities on private lands. If the landowners and outfitters are required to meet objective and/or prescription or lose their generous permit levels, there may be some incentive to get the resident "public" hunters involved in that process. Enhanced stewardship from involved landowners may actually lead to improved public hunter tolerance.

#3) Provide a strategic means to help stabilize the commercial side of elk management by expanding nonresident permit levels. Although many disagree with any form of supporting the privatizing of a public resource (elk), most agree that a regulated and controlled industry is much preferred over one that will not work towards common management goals. If balance is the objective, these folks will need to be onboard with the strategy.

#4) Provide a safeguard that would remove the expanded nonresident permits levels if management population goals are not met in the biennium department review process. Basically, if things stay the way they are (very little private land elk harvest) the management strategy returns to the existing 2011 permit status.

To further clarify the details or the regulation structure behind Alternative 3, the additional set of permits is intended to accommodate commercial/fee hunting interests but is maintained only if harvest or population objectives are being met. Specifically, the number of permits is ultimately intended to allow a successful number of nonresident applicants equal to the 2007 number of outfitted nonresident either sex elk archery hunters in the described areas and would only be valid on private lands outside Block Management Areas. The permits would initially be unlimited for two years only to identify the number of limited permits necessary to achieve a number of successful nonresidents equal to the 2007 number of outfitted nonresident elk archery hunters. The permits would become limited after these initial two years. The recommendation would not guarantee any one person a permit but would look to award a specific number of permits. The successful applicants may or may not be outfitted hunters. Assumptions include the tenet that additional archery permits are valued enough by private landowners and outfitters to prompt

additional public access/harvest across the archery and rifle seasons—leading to positive adjustments to elk distribution and elk availability to public hunters.

The appearance of this alternative as the top performing option generated considerable discussion and debate. As individuals overtly challenged, supported or quietly contemplated these results, discussion inputs ranged from a call to revisit process and fundamental objectives, to moving forward with the recommendation of Alternative 3, to asserting the alternative considered elk management over hunter interests. At meeting's end, the group recognized the need for additional time and identified a one-day meeting on November 4 in Lewistown. Between the Miles City and November 4 Lewistown meeting, emails from certain working group members further challenged the mathematical standardization, adamantly maintained the process weighted too heavily the commercial interests, overly emphasized effective elk management, and did not properly weight the interests of resident bow hunters.

DECISION

At the final November 4th meeting in Lewistown, the decision analysis results were revisited. In response to inputs from working group members, the mathematical standardization was removed and several “what if” exercises (a procedural asset of SDM) were conducted where fundamental objectives representing commercial interests and effective elk management were removed from the analysis. These new results were presented to the entire working group in Lewistown on November 4. After removing fundamental objectives for commercial interests, the degree to which Alternative 3 outperformed other alternatives was reduced but this option remained the top performer. Removing fundamental objectives for both commercial interests and effective elk management resulted in comparable support for the status quo alternative and Alternative 3. Alternative weightings for fundamental objectives were also explored, with results showing that weights assigned by the group were not responsible for the dominance of Alternative 3 in the decision analysis. The group expressed no further interest in re-evaluating fundamental objectives or their weights, although a small minority remained concerned.

Additionally, the results of hunters and landowners within the working group were separated and presented—the two groups predicted different decision outcomes. While landowners identified Alternative 3 as the most supported with little support for the status quo, hunters identified the status quo as the most supported with alternatives 4 and 3 placing 2nd and 3rd, respectively. The group's overall identification of Alternative 3 was thus due to strong support from landowners combined with moderate support from hunters and did not reflect a common assessment by all individuals or sub-groupings of individuals.

The group identified an interest in discussing why Alternative 3 was problematic for some—and what might be changed, either in terms of modifications to Alternative 3 or the identification of a new alternative, to address those concerns. Break-out groups were assigned with results listed below.

Problems Group #1

Separating regulations on public and private lands—is that a negative precedent for these and other areas in the state over time? Unintended consequences?

Limiting of public land hunters but not private land hunters

Continuing trend of more restrictive permits

Refinements to address concerns--Group #1

License preference system extended to permits

Two seasons (10% each) – would eliminate the split on public and private lands

Antlerless only is already a possibility within Commission authority; doesn't need alternative #3 to be available as a tool

Assess objective status separately – don't include elk in refuge areas

Problems Group #2

Concern that couldn't shoot harvest targets in two weeks of five week season—how to distribute harvest across season?

Population objectives would become a politically motivated subject (both ways—concern that objectives will be set to never be met)

If unlimited permits weren't first choice only, would flood block management (or if permits were valid on private lands in block management)

Refinements to address concerns--Group #2

Preclude private permits from private lands in block management

Permits first choice only

Problems Group #3

Are surveys sufficient to measure two year criteria?

Concern over unlimited permits

Refinements to address concerns—Group #3

Reporting requirements/follow-up surveys of hunters that held permits

Equitable harvest of bulls across ownerships

Some measure of access to public and private lands—monitor access levels/no net loss of block management

Consider how to enhance nonresident success for permits—equal to 2007 levels?

Discussion identified concern over (negative) precedent relative to public trust—specifically the development of landowner licenses and public licenses. The absence of additional or returned mobility for resident archers was also noted. Antlerless only seasons were identified as difficult measures to implement and so potentially a liability for any recommendation or its implementation. The group identified that the various different/competing perspectives would need sufficient trust in order to make the implementation of Alternative #3 successful in meeting objectives, and in the absence of trust, additional regulation would be needed to make this type of season successful. With these inputs, Alternative 3 was modified with considerable group discussion, although no refinement was identified to increase hunter mobility. The refinement is listed below. Its consequences were not formally re-evaluated.

Group Alternative 3 REFINED (11/4/11)

In and Out of Breaks--limited permits status quo valid throughout the district

Only on private lands outside block management areas—add limited first and only choice (first biennium is unlimited) ES archery permits if elk population is within objective or if annual harvest prescription is met (Commission review every two years); only place to hunt bull elk in archery and rifle season; in some areas will require a 2, 4 or 6 year harvest plan based upon post season survey efforts of elk and harvest surveys of estimated harvest; so will count ALL elk to include problematic concentrations*

Private land permits first at unlimited first and only for 2012 and 2013; intent is to identify total permit level that accommodates 2007 level of nonresidents with outfitters on private lands (number from Board of Outfitters)

Private land permit is removed if above objective or missing harvest prescription

Maintain this group with charge to annually assess effectiveness and possible adjustments at hunting district level (meeting post- season and late summer, changes only available biennially); this evaluation shall include efforts to assess harvest of bulls on different permits and elk distribution

of elk on public and private lands during the hunting season; also to include assessment of harvest and population status; assessment is relative to fundamental objectives; survey effort to assess access levels—no net loss; summaries of outfitted acres; some survey methodology will need to be further developed; NOTE—changes available only biennially

**2-year intervals would be the last year of the previous biennium and the first year of the current biennium*

Recognizing that any one season type may only be a next step in a continuing process, there was strong majority (9 to 1) support for presenting this refined Alternative 3 as a recommendation to the Commission. No member was completely convinced the alternative would work. Most members thought Alternative 3 worth trying based upon the assumption that additional archery permits were “carrot” enough to encourage additional access and harvest across both the archery and rifle seasons, and that additional access/harvest would result in positively adjusted elk distribution relative to public opportunity. One group member continued to oppose the alternative and would not agree that the alternative should be forwarded to the commission or implemented, citing the lack of hunter mobility and the unwanted trend toward more (rather than less) permits. In communications following the November 4 meeting, an additional working group member challenged the SDM process as leading and then focusing the discussion only on Alternative 3. Ultimately this individual removed support for Alternative 3 citing opposition he had received from hunters outside the working group. Even so, at the start of this summary writing strong majority support (8-2) remained within the working group to recommend Alternative 3, as refined at the November 4 meeting. After it was communicated FWP was going to recommend the proposal be adopted for public comment without initially stating support or opposition to emphasize the merits of the recommendation itself for public review, the person to originally recommend the idea removed his support (taking working group support to 7-3). This person stated the reason he could not continue to support the idea was that FWP staff would have to be fully committed to implementing the idea in order to avoid unintended consequences of the idea, and he saw the decision by FWP to forward the proposal at this time solely as an Archery Working Group proposal (i.e., not a joint FWP-Archery Working Group proposal) as less than complete commitment by FWP.

CONSIDERATIONS

There are several assumptions used to make predictions that may or may not prove valid.

FWP would need to provide and effectively communicate annual and timely harvest prescriptions and/or status reports. In some areas this will likely require some refinement to survey process, and in all cases this will require time and effort for wildlife managers and biologists to make prescriptions.

The first cycle of any adoption would have only a one year assessment available at the next biennial season setting. After that, two years would be available.

Efforts to identify the 2007 number of outfitted nonresident either sex elk archery hunters through the Board of Outfitters are ongoing—and may not be successful given available records.

Interest in any drawing may change over time. It is likely any one year's drawing may miss the exact target of permit numbers drawn by residents and/or nonresidents.